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ABSTRACT

This paper chronicles the collaboration of Boston's English High School with the University of Massachusetts. It begins with a history of the school from its start in 1820 up to the late sixties when the school achieved more of a minority population. After a problematical beginning plagued by lack of coordination and direction, the collaborative program made a change in administrative responsibilities and staffing patterns that heralded a period of great energy and enthusiasm among teachers. At this time the goals of the collaboration were set down as staff development, curriculum development, and improvement in communications. A teacher center was established. However, two years later, at the time of the writing of this paper, the situation was one of worry about declining school enrollments, low morale, and dissatisfaction with administration. It is difficult to analyze effects of the innovation because the school conditions and the people involved have changed. The teacher center, cluster programs, and a college incentive program remain as evidence that collaboration can produce positive programs. Although the collaboration has not achieved all its goals, the university has contributed to the life of the school. (JM)

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"THE STRUCTURE AND CLIMATE OF AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL BEFORE AND AFTER A MAJOR INNOVATION"

SYMPOSIUM ON EVALUATING COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

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Historical Background

The English High School, so named to differentiate it from Boston Latin School, was an educational innovative of the 1820's. It was a new type of high school designed to prepare young men for the trades and commerce. The curriculum stressed the sciences, did not include classical courses, and self-government was an important aspect of amore humane approach to educating youth. Caning and the more traditional punishments were discarded as ill-befitting the new curriculum.

Students were selected on the basis of examination scores until 1870 when admission was made less selective. However, there were placement exams in mathematics and english, and many students were inhibited from applying because of the general impression that those exams determined admission. There were high standards set for admission though based on elementary school performance; this combined with the cost and time required for transportation discouraged many students from applying for entrance. The School had a fine reputation, sent many of its' graduates to college and was proud to point out many influential men who were alumni.

The Boston School Committee played the role of villain and disrupted the life of English High School when it determined in 1967 that instead of being a citywide school, it would enroll students from designated junior high schools. The School Committee had developed a technique for segregating secondary schools which defied logic and rested on a mythical concept of "feeder patterns": a combination of available seat assignments,

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preferences and options. The method then allowed some high schools to be either Caucasian or Black. The decision was made by the School Committee that it should have a primarily Black enrollment, and the location was to have been changed to a primarily Black neighborhood in a nineteenth century building upon the completion of a new ten-story tower building across the street from the Latin School.

The rapid increase in minority students had a devastating effect on the staff who had not been prepared to understand students from different backgrounds; the Boston teachers were primarily Irish Catholic graduates of Boston State College, formerly the District's Normal School. The faculty's collective self-esteem was damaged by what was interpreted as the School Committee's ultimate insult to the English High School and its staff, taking away the building. In addition, there was considerable community unrest and confrontations as the Black organizations and activitists attempted to force the School Committee to desegregate the schools. Picket lines, shouting matches with the School Committee, boycotts, and finally a court suit were a part of the external environment while the internal environment of the School was equally as fractious.

The alumni of the School, well structured and active in their support of English, assessed the situation and determined that none of the internal constituents could confront the School Committee and win. They concluded that only the Alumni Association could save the building and the proud tradition of the School; they rallied the energies and financial support of the many influential "English Men" throughout the city and the Commonwealth. The School Committee was sued to prevent them from giving the new tower building to Girls Latin, and the alumni won the decision.

The four years before the collaboration with University were filled with changes in enrollment, first co-education and then desegregation;

changes in staff, more women teachers, removal of a popular Head Master resulting in a court suit and a divided faculty; changes in the organizational structure to accommodate to the new facility; changes in the curriculum to adapt to the interests and abilities of the students. All of the above created an immense strain on the faculty who were very involved in efforts to create an environment and a program for learning. However, racial disturbances and disruptions had a ripple effect, and though the hostilities often centered in another school or neighborhood, the English High students were affected by reports and rumors and disrupted the English High environment.

It would be ideal and in keeping with a case study of staff development, if I could report that the teachers assessed their needs and requested the support of the University of Massachusetts. However, that was not the case, the school/University parings was one of the creative responses, of the Federal Court to school desegregation in Boston. The English High School was not paired with UMass but with another institution with the goal of strengthening the magnet program in the arts. The way in which the University and English came together is a perfect example of the "old boy network". The then Superintendent of the Boston Schools and the then Dean of the School of Education at UMass/Amherst happened to talk at a dinner and sketched out a verbal agreement on the program. By the time that staff from the two institutions sat down to work out the details, both men were gone, one not renewed by the School Committee and the other on leave in southern Africa.

The President of the University saw the collaboration as a way to show the more powerful and traditional collegiate institutions and the Legislature that the public University could make a contribution to the city. He also hoped that he could encourage the faculty of the Boston Campus to become more urban oriented, and he wanted the Graduate Division

at Amherst to pave the way for off-campus graduate programs for professionals working in the field. The Amherst based Education faculty were committed to off-campus programs and viewed the collaboration as an opportunity to offer services in the city of Boston. A senior professor was named to direct the project, because he had considerable administrative experience in large urban areas in school districts in New England. He was also an eloquent advocate of changing schools through innovative programs.

The results of a summer of planning, developing alternatives and getting acquainted with other teachers, administrators and parents were delayed when the teachers struck at the beginning of the school year. However, that was minor compared to the major problem of a lack of administrative coordination and direction and diverse perceptions of the program on the part of almost every group within the collaboration. For every stated personal and organizational goal expressed, one could quicklyyfind an opposite goal: "easy way to get a graduate degree or credits", "too hard to get a graduate degree in the program"; "the University will be involved for at least three years or until everyone has completed his/her program", "they (University) won't be here next year"; "there is not enough money to hire the appropriate number of staff", "the University is making money and can hire a lot of new staff".

During the first semester, there was a succession of crises in planning, programming, handling the details of registration, and lack of specificity about the future of the program required a change in the administrative responsibilities and staffing pattern. This helped minimize the suspicion and anxiety so that everyone began to settle down and concentrate on their projects. Continual interpretation of the program to the University's Graduate Division began to show some results as the Deans made some concessions; they were reassured to know that the

program was not a "rip-off" and that standards were being maintained.

In retrospect, the period of the second beginning, was characterized by great activity and energy on the part of the teachers, Headmaster, administrative staff of the High School and the University. There was a spirit of cooperation between the Headmaster, the Faculty Senate, the Union, and the University people. The UMass staff and the curriculum bridged the gap between school and University so that courses and study programs were individualized to meet specific interests. The emphasis on developing alternative models of schooling within English High tended to exclude some teachers who were not involved those model programs or who were critical of innovations.

There was one person who could have been called "the cog" keeping the machine running, the glue which kept everything together, the fount of information, the interpreter, the counselor, and the key actor. He was Administrative Assistant to the Headmaster and played a critical role in having the collaboration understood and accepted by the "old timers" on the faculty. He was a key informant who helped the University people understand the School, the history, the relationships policies and customs. He interpreted the University to the faculty and functioned as a message center since his desk was in the center of the Main Office, and "Jack knew everything". He also cultivated the alumni and catered to them so that they remained as a strong source of support for the School.

During this period of activity, there were many committees established to explore and implement new ideas, make decisions, settle grievances, problems or differences of opinions. Things hummed along rather smoothly as the participants felt that they were developing programs which would make a difference. The goals and objectives of the collaboration are made explicit:

I. Staff Development

A. To improve English High School staff's skills through in-service courses and workshops in teaching methods, administration, supervision, urban problems, and evaluation.

B. To increase English High School staff's sensitivity to contemporary cultural pluralism and civil rights issues including racism and sexism.

C. To train staff to do institutional research.

II. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

A. To assess, modify, and extend existing curricular offerings at English High School,

B. To refine, extend, improve existing atlernatives.

III. IMPROVEMENT IN COMMUNICATIONS

A. To include students', parents', and the community's needs and opinions in the decision-making process at English High School.

B. To increase communication among staff, parents, students, and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

C. To identify and use community, volunteer, and parental resources to provide technical assistance, career information, volunteer help, role models, and fieldwork placements."

(Evaluation Report, Dr. Kathleen D. Lyman, July 1977)

Dr. Lyman's evaluation the following year described the disruption in the administrative staffing and the uncertainty in which the teachers were functioning. The School had a full scale accreditation visit in the Fall; the Headmaster was promoted in December, and there was no designated administrative head for several weeks; the Administrative Assistant died suddenly, and the biggest blizzard in decades all served to provide discontinuity. There was a "pulling together in adversity" and the general

morale was high. The Teacher Center was established as tangible evidence of the commitment to staff development.

Now, it is two years later, and the situation is drastically different. There are administrators new to English, who have been given permanent positions, but the overarching mood is one ofuncertainty. It is the echo of a question heard in educational gatherings across the country, what will be effect of the decline in school enrollments? Some teachers have already been reassigned, and others know that they will soon face the same fate or will be out of a job. The national economic picture, the prospects of leaving a profession which they love, the perception of increased stresses in the School combined with a sense of isolation has had a significant effect on the morale of the teaching staff. These are factors over which the University has no control but which affect the collaborative relationship.

The teachers seem to have withdrawmn from cooperation or confrontation with the administration and express distrust of the methods. They seem to have less faith in the power of the Faculty Senate; the lack of interest in running for election and the dearth of candidates for Senate positions are an indication of this problem. The Union is busily preparing for an anticipated strike in the Fall of 1980, so many teachers concentrate their activities within the Teacher Center and are busily accuring additional credits or degrees to provide additional security when there are additional teacher lay-offs.

Some teachers express the sentiment that they are so "fed up" that they close their door and assume control of their classes in preference to involvement with the life of the entire School. The Teacher Center offers the faculty a place to gather, a place to discuss teaching and resources which they can use in their classroom. There are evidences of "siege mentality" which perhaps contributes to the welcome security of the

classroom and the continuing effort to help their students.

The University classes have less application to alternative schooling and/or programs. The emphasis seems to have shifted to fulfilling certification requirements and general professional development topics; the courses are less particularized and have more traditional descriptions. There are some enrollments from professionals who work outside the English High School, so the graduate program has begun to look more coventional. However, the problems with the Graduate Division have reappeared, in the same form as four years earlier. Unfortunately, those problems and delays affect the teachers' perception of the University's competence and commitment, and it appears that there is not an institutional commitment to educating working professionals in a setting remote from the Registrar and University faculty.

Now, let me attempt to address the question which was assigned to me, what has happened to the structure and climate as a result of a major innovation? It is very difficult to objectively analyze an innovation and/or its effect because the conditions change and we did not work with the same people in each of the years of the projects' life. The staff of both the University and the School have changed several times during the course of the collaboration, and each time that this happens, the parameters and internal environment changes. Each set of actors bring to the pact, different expectations, objectives, goals and styles. We have learned, however that an innovation must have the support of the administrators of all the organizations involved, not just the passive support but the creative support designed to overcome bureaucratic obstacles.

The Teacher Center, the Cluster Programs, and the new college incentive program are very tangible evidences that the collaboration can produce positive programs. These activities offer visible evidence that it is possible to redefine energies in a way that teaching is made more effective

and teacher satisfaction increases.

Another tangible evidence of accomplishment can be measured in numbers of graduate degrees and credits which the teachers have achieved as a result of the collaboration. This has helped them achieve mobility and self-confidence and might not have emerged without the University; this is highly speculative and cannot be documented at this stage of the relationship. There are more women opinion leaders now than there were four years ago, and the University should take credit for providing the vehicle for some of the highly motivated women to expand their professional training, to have experiences providing them leadership opportunities. There is still much to be done in this area, but the informal leadership has changed to include women, and the School is less male-dominated.

Four years ago, the center of power was in the Headmaster's office, partially the result of tradition and partially resulting from the charismatic leadership of the occupant of that office. However, the Faculty Senate and the Union (overlapping membership) also shared in the power relationship and represented a strong force within the building. The status of both groups has been diminished, and their activities are more perfunctory than forceful. Relationships with the Headmaster are less positive and constructive because of his style and response to that style; by tacit acquiescence, the teachers have withdrawn from the process of decision making and are settling into a defensive/reactive posture vis-a-vis the building administrators.

As a growing body of research indicates, the quality of the leadership of a school building makes a significant difference in the way in which the constituency in that building perform. The situation at English High School tends to exemplify those findings though student achievement in Boston is difficult to measure as school populations are shifted regularly and different tests are used each year. However, the

quality of the administrative leadership and relationship to the teaching staff shows in the level of faculty morale and participation. The teachers feel less like team members and more caught in a morass with little control. Low morale and defeatism are bound to be reflected in the program of the school and have an impact on the students; there appears to be less hope, less joy, less enthusiasm, less sense of control than existed four years ago.

An outside organization, like the University of Massachusetts School of Education, can make a contribution to change in a school only if it plays a supportive role to the internal participants who determine the direction and the scope of the program. The University people were able to support the teachers by offering programs which met their needs and worked cooperatively with the administration to reinforce some of the goals of the building leadership. There are too many external forces over which neither the English High staff nor the University have any control so that the racial climate and intergroup relationships are more determined by those external forces than the activities within the school.

Even though the results of the collaboration may not have achieved all of the goals in the ways in which they had been anticipated, the University has contributed to the life of the school. It has opened windows to the world and the profession to some; it has offered new opportunities to some; it has created new alliances and friendships for some; it has demonstrated that a public university does not need sit aloof but can reach out and involve itself with professionals in their work setting. In summary, I think that the collaboration has enriched the lives and intellects of all of us who have been in the midst of that partnership.